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The Country Mouse.

By TEMPLE BAILEY. Copyright, 1907, by N. E. Daley.

Felicia packed into a little trunk her one white party dress, a pretty gray dinner gown, a half dozen shirt waists and an extra hat, and away she went to town to visit her cousin, Mary Barnes.

Mary's brother Roger met her at the station. "Mary is planning no end of things for you," he told Felicia when he had settled her in the carriage. "She is going to give a luncheon and a tea and a theater party and a dance, and half of her friends are enlisted to make you have a good time. It will be a lively existence for you, little girl."

"Oh," Felicia leaned forward. "I shall love it! My greatest excitement for a year has been a church social or a sleigh ride, and I am longing for society."

"Mary spells society with a big 'S,'" Roger told her. "She is a slave to it, and she needs a rest. She is as thin as a wafer and as pale as paper."

"But think what a lovely time she has!" Felicia said, all pink and white with enthusiasm.

"Humph!" Roger said. "You don't know when you are well off, little Felicia."

But Felicia fell on Mary's neck when she reached the great stone mansion. "I can stay two weeks," she said. "The school board gave me a vacation, and I am going to have the time of my life."

"Indeed you are," Mary said and carried her away to a delectable bedroom, where rose leaves drifted across the wall paper.

"I'll get into my kimono, and then we can talk," Felicia said joyously as she opened her little black bag. But Mary shook her head dubiously. "The girls are coming for luncheon in just a half hour. There are ten of them, and the table decorations are to be in pale pink, because that is your favorite color."

"What shall I wear?" Felicia asked. "I have a gray gown and a white one, and the white one is for evening."

"The gray will be all right with a ducky little knot of pink carnations and lilies of the valley. The florists are doing them that way now, and Roger can get you some."

Roger got the flowers, but the gray gown was not gorgeous, and beside Mary's shimmering chiffon creation Felicia felt depressingly shabby.

But the luncheon was exquisite, and the girls were friendly, and Felicia did not have much time to think of herself, for there was a tea on immediately after, and she was carried off by Mary and Roger, wearing a long and splendid wrap of Mary's, for her own simple tailor-made jacket was out of the question.

"No one will notice that it is mine," Mary assured her, "in the crush," so Felicia, feeling very elegant, swept through the crowded rooms and talked as fast as she could to dozens of people and came out breathless.

"Wasn't it awful?" Roger asked her. "I shouldn't have gone a step if it hadn't been for you."

"It was delightful, Felicia gurgled—"the pretty women, the lights, the music, the bees and everything."

"Humph!" Roger grumbled, and Felicia made a little face at him and said, "You're an unsocial bear, Roger," and Roger said, "Oh, it's such a waste of good material for you to spend your time with such people when you might be talking to me, Felicia."

Felicia opened her eyes wide at that. "Do you like to talk to me, Roger?" she questioned, and Roger laughed and said, "Yes, but you don't deserve it." And Felicia, feeling very much flattered, leaned back in the carriage and peeped at Roger now and then, while Mary mapped out the programme for the next day.

"We will go to the hairdresser's early. Roger, don't you think Felicia will look dear with her hair marceled?"

"I think Felicia looks dear with her hair any way."

"O-o-o-h," murmured Felicia from her corner.

Mary laughed and went on. "There are the Deering luncheon and the Colburns' dinner and a box party after, and then the collation."

"Oh, stop!" Felicia pleaded, looking at her cousin with startled eyes. "Do you expect me to do all that in one day, Mary?"

"She does," Roger asserted, surveying his country cousin with melancholy eyes. "and where, oh, where in all that programme will you have a minute to spend with me?"

"I am not worrying about that," Felicia told him, dimpling, "but what am I going to wear, Mary? What am I going to wear?"

"There's your white dress," Mary said slowly.

"But I can't wear that one dress to a luncheon and three teas and a theater party and a dance. What are you going to wear, Mary?"

There were dark circles around her eyes. "Oh, I don't know; I don't know," she said. "Sometimes I feel as if I were on a treadmill and no one would let me stop."

Felicia looked at her with startled eyes. "Why, I thought you liked it," she gasped.

Mary straightened up at that. "Oh, when I get into it," she said, trying to speak lightly, "it's not so bad, but I have felt the strain this winter awfully."

Between rushes that night Roger caught Felicia for a moment alone in the library. "Mary is dreadfully blue," he told her. "She broke her engagement with Bob Carruth in the summer, and she hasn't seen him since, and she misses him."

"What did she break it for?" Felicia asked.

"He wanted her to go south with him and settle in a little town where he could practice medicine, and she wouldn't give up society, and now I think she regrets it."

"Oh," said little Felicia. "If I loved a man I would go to the end of the world with him!"

"Would you?" Roger asked.

"Yes."

"Well, I am leaving for Japan next week," ingratiatingly.

Felicia gazed at him with intense indignation for a moment; then she turned her back on him. "Silly!" she said.

When Felicia went to bed that night she was so tired that she could not sleep. The next morning she was as pale as Mary. For a week the two girls dragged their engagements, finishing up on Saturday night with another collation.

"Felicia wore her white dress. It was muddled, and she knew that she was not looking her best, but she was so tired that she did not care. Roger had sent her a bunch of violets, and her dance card was filled with names, but the fact gave her no satisfaction."

"The fourth dance was Roger's. 'Enjoying it?' he asked briefly as he swung her out into the floor.

"Oh, I am so tired I shall drop," she said. "Can't I go home, Roger?"

She looked so like a little weary child that Roger laughed.

"Baby," he teased and then tenderly. "I'll hunt Mary up, and we will cut the rest of it."

In the carriage Mary collapsed. "I didn't dream I was so tired," she sobbed, with her head on Felicia's shoulder, and Roger, surveying the pair with twinkling eyes, said, "Let me prescribe."

"Well?" came back in muffled agreement.

"You pack your trunk, Mary," he planned, "and go home with Felicia. It's lovely in the country now, and I'll come up and bring Bob Carruth with me."

Mary sat up, with her face ablaze. "Bob Carruth?"

"Yes. I had a letter from him yesterday. He's coming up for a visit."

Faint pink tinged Mary's cheeks. "Do you think he will want to see me, Roger?" she asked wistfully, and Roger said gently, "I know he will, Mary."

So Felicia packed her little trunk, and Mary packed a larger one, and away they went to the country, where the trees were crimson and gold and brown and where the air was like wine. And there Bob Carruth and Roger followed them.

"So she is really going to marry him and live in a country town," Roger commented, and he and Felicia followed Mary and her lover along a path that seemed to end in a golden sunset.

"Yes," Felicia said.

"And you are going to marry me and come and live in the city," Roger ventured.

"I haven't promised yet," said little Felicia. "I am afraid that some day I should be saying, 'Give me again my hollow tree, my crust of bread and liberty!'"

"You aren't afraid of anything of the kind," Roger told her. "You know we would live happy ever after."

"Oh, well, if you are so sure," said Felicia as she tucked a confiding hand through his arm and looked up at him with happy eyes, "I guess I shall have to say yes, Roger."

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